

Thomas Jefferson to James Sullivan, August 12, 1808, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS J. MSS. (JAMES SULLIVAN.)

Monticello, Aug 12, 08.

Sir, —Your letter of July 21 has been received some days; that of July 23 not till yesterday. Some accident had probably detained it on the road considerably beyond its regular passage. In the former you mention that you had thought it advisable to continue issuing certificates for the importation of flour, until you could hear further from me; and in the latter, that you will be called from the Capital in the fall months, after which it is your desire that the power of issuing certificates may be given to some other, if it is to be continued.

In mine of July 16th I had stated that, during the two months preceding that, your certificates, received at the Treasury, amounted, if I rightly recollect, to about 60,000 barrels of flour, & a proportionable quantity of corn. If this whole quantity had been *bonâ fide* landed & retained in Massachusetts, I deemed it certain there could not be a real want for a considerable time, &, therefore, desired the issues of certificates might be discontinued. If, on the other hand, a part has been carried to foreign markets, it proves the necessity of restricting reasonably this avenue to abuse. This is my sole object, and not that a real want of a single individual should be one day unsupplied. In this I am certain we shall have the concurrence of all the good citizens of Massachusetts, who are too patriotic and too just to desire, by calling for what is superfluous, to open a door for the frauds of unprincipled individuals who, trampling on the laws, and forcing a commerce shut to all others, are enriching themselves on the sacrifices of their honester fellow citizens;—

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sacrifices to which these are generally & willingly submitting, as equally necessary whether to avoid

or prepare for war.

Still further, however, to secure the State against all danger of want, I will request you to continue issuing certificates, in the moderate way proposed in your letter, until your departure from the Capital, as before stated, when I will consider it as discontinued, or make another appointment if necessary. There is less risk of inconvenience in this, as, by a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, of May 20th, the collectors were advised not to detain any vessel, the articles of whose lading were so proportioned as to give no cause of suspicion that they were destined for a foreign market. This mode of supply alone seems to have been sufficient for the other importing States, if we may judge from the little use they have made of the permission to issue certificates.

Should these reasonable precautions be followed, as is surmised in your letter of July 21, by an artificial scarcity, with a view to promote turbulence of any sort or on any pretext, I trust for an ample security against this danger to the character of my fellow citizens of Massachusetts, which has, I think, been emphatically marked by obedience to law, & a love of order. And I have no doubt that whilst we do our duty, they will support us in it. The laws enacted by the general government, will have made it our duty to have the embargo strictly observed, for the general good; & we are sworn to execute the laws. If clamor ensue, it will be from the few only, who will clamor whatever we do. I shall be happy to receive the estimate promised by your Excellency, as it may assist to guide us in the cautions we may find necessary. And here I will beg leave to recall your attention to a mere error of arithmetic in your letter of July 23. The quantity of flour requisite on the date there given, would be between thirteen & fourteen thousand barrels per month. I beg you to accept my salutations, & assurances of high respect & consideration.